



For the first time in 100 years

EASY

• LOVECRAFT •

TO READ

Completely revised and abridged

•
D a g o n ,
The Horror At Red Hook,
and other tales
•

H. P. LOVECRAFT

LOVECRAFT: EASY TO READ



EASY
• LOVECRAFT •
TO READ



Easy To Read Series Vol. 1

ARK TUNDRA
PUBLISHING

Copyright © 2018 by Ark Tundra.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Lovecraft, H. P. (Howard Phillips), 1890–1937

Lovecraft: Easy To Read / H. P. Lovecraft

Completely revised and abridged text.

Includes explanatory notes.

1. FICTION / Horror

2. LANGUAGE ARTS & DISCIPLINES / Reading Skills

3. STUDY AIDS / English Proficiency

ISBN: 978-91-88895-00-4

Cover Design and Layout: Ark Tundra

ARK TUNDRA

www.arktundra.com

This book is available at quantity discounts for bulk purchases. For information, please e-mail us at sales@arktundra.com, or call +44 (0) 186 55 22 572





In The Vault	9
Cool Air	23
The Horror At Red Hook	39
Dagon	73
The Terrible Old Man	83
A Note On The Text	91
Explanatory Notes	94



In The Vault

Birch changed his business in 1881, yet never discussed why. It was generally agreed that the shock he had suffered was the result of an accident where Birch had locked himself in the tomb for nine hours.

He only managed to escape by crude means. And while this much was true, there were other things that he only told me about when he was drunk. He trusted me because I was his doctor, and because he felt the need to confide in someone else after Davis, his old doctor, had died.

Before 1881, Birch had been the village undertaker of Peck Valley. He was a very hard and simple person, even as undertakers go. His work habits would be hard to believe today, at least in a city; and even Peck Valley would have shuddered, had it known the easy morals of its undertaker. For example, what happened to expensive clothing that is invisible under the casket's lid; or how the limbs of dead bodies could fit into coffins that were too small.

Most clearly Birch was thoughtless and undesirable as a workman. I still think, however, that he was not an evil man. He was simply very crude—and an alcoholic.

Just where to begin Birch's story is hard to decide, as I am no great storyteller. Perhaps one should start in the cold December of 1880, when the ground froze and the undertakers could dig no more graves. Luckily, the village was small and the death rate low, so that it was possible to keep all of Birch's unburied corpses in the receiving tomb. The undertaker grew weary in the bad weather, and seemed even more careless than normal. He knocked together worse caskets, and showed no regard for the rusty lock on the tomb door, which he slammed open and shut all the time.

At last spring came, and graves were prepared for the nine dead people, which waited in the tomb. Birch did not look forward to the work, but began his task of moving the bodies one April morning. After having laid just one of them to its permanent rest before noon, he stopped because of a rain that upset his horse. The body was that of Darius Peck, whose grave was not far from the tomb. Birch decided that he would begin the next day with little old Matthew Fenner, whose grave was also nearby. Actually, he put the matter off for three days, and did not get to work until Good Friday, the 15th.

Because he did not believe in superstition, he did not notice the day at all. Though ever since he refused to do anything of importance on that fateful sixth day of the week. Certainly, the events of that evening greatly changed George Birch.

On the afternoon of Friday, April 15th, he set out with horse and wagon to transfer the body of Matthew Fenner. He later admitted that he was not sober, but he had not then started to drink as much as later in life, when he tried to forget certain things.

He was careless enough to annoy his horse, which resisted as he drew it up to the tomb, the same way as on that other occasion when the rain had upset it. The day was clear, but a wind had come up. Birch was glad to take shelter as he locked open the iron door and entered the vault. Another person might not have liked the damp chamber with the eight coffins inside, but Birch in those days was insensitive. His only concern was to get the right coffin for the right grave. He had not forgotten the scolding he had received when Hannah Bixby's relatives, who had wished to transfer her body to the cemetery in the city, found the casket of Judge Capwell beneath her headstone. The light was dim, but Birch's sight was good, and he did not get Asaph Sawyer's coffin by mistake, although it looked very similar.

He had, indeed, made that coffin for Matthew Fenner; but had cast it aside because it was too rickety. He recalled how kind and generous the little old man had been to him during his bankruptcy five years before, which softened his heart for a moment. He gave old Matt the very best that he could produce, but was careful to save the rejected coffin, and to use it when Asaph Sawyer had died. Sawyer was not a nice man, and many stories were told of his cruelty, and that he never forgot wrongs, real or imagined. To him Birch had felt no regret in giving him the badly made coffin, which he now pushed out of the way for the Fenner casket.

Just as he had recognized old Matt's coffin, the wind blew and the door slammed shut, leaving him in a twilight. The narrow window pane admitted only faint rays of light, and the overhead funnel none at all. He was forced to fumble his way among the boxes toward the latch.

In this twilight he rattled the handles, pushed at the panels, and wondered why the portal had become so hard to open. He began to realize that he was locked in and started to shout loudly, as if his horse outside could do anything to help. The latch was obviously broken, and left the undertaker trapped in the vault, a victim of his own mistake.

The thing must have happened at about three-thirty in the afternoon. Birch, being calm and practical by nature, did not shout long. Instead he went on to locate some tools that were in the corner of the tomb. He was not touched by the horror of his situation at all, but being imprisoned so far from the world was enough to rile him. Unfortunately his day's work was interrupted, and unless someone would come around, he might have to remain in the vault all night or longer. When he reached the pile of tools, he selected a hammer and a chisel, and returned over the coffins to the door. The air had started to become unpleasant; but he paid no attention to it as he worked at the metal of the latch. He would have given anything for a lantern, but he went on without seeing much as best he could.

When he realized that the latch would not yield to such small tools, Birch looked around for other possible ways of escape. The vault had been dug from a hillside, so that the narrow ventilation funnel in the top ran through several feet of earth. This made the direction utterly useless as a way of escape. Over the door, however, the high transom could possibly be enlarged by a good worker. His eyes rested long on this as he racked his brains on how to reach it. There was nothing like a ladder in the tomb, and the coffin niches on the sides afforded no climb to the space above the door.

Only the coffins remained as potential stepping-stones, and as he considered these, he speculated on the best way of moving them. He figured that the height of three coffins would be enough to let him reach the transom, but he could do better with four. The boxes were fairly even and could be piled up like blocks. Therefore he began to figure out how he might use the eight coffins to make a platform. As he planned, he could not help but wish that the units of his planned staircase had been better made. Finally he decided to lay out a base of three coffins along the wall, to place upon this two layers of two each, and upon these a single box to serve as the platform.

This arrangement could be climbed with the least problems and would have the required height. Better still, he would use only two boxes to support the construction, and leave one free to be piled on top, if needed. And so he worked in the twilight, lifting the coffins as his miniature Tower of Babel started to rise.[1] Several of the coffins began to split when he handled them, and he planned to save the best built casket of little Matthew Fenner for the top. In the half-gloom he hoped that he would catch the right one, and he came upon it almost by accident, since it fell into his hands as if through an odd wish. The tower was soon finished, and he rested his aching arms as he sat on the bottom step of his grim device. Then Birch carefully climbed up with his tools and stood in line with the narrow transom.

The borders of the space were out of brick, and there seemed little doubt that he could shortly chisel away enough to pass through it. As he started to hammer, the horse outside neighed.

Nightfall came and Birch was still laboring. He worked only by feeling now, since the moon was hidden by clouds; and though it was still coming along slowly, he felt encouraged at how far he had come by then. He could, he was sure, get out by midnight. Undisturbed by any thoughts of time, place, and the company under his feet, he chipped away at the stony brickwork. He cursed when a fragment hit him in the face, and laughed when one struck the horse outside. In time the hole grew so large that he tried to crawl through it, shifting around so that the coffins under him rocked and creaked. He found that he would not have to pile another casket on his platform to be able to reach it. The hole was on exactly the right level to use as soon as it was big enough.

It was midnight when Birch decided he could get through the transom. Tired and sweaty, he climbed down to the floor and sat a while on the bottom box to gather strength. Outside, the horse was hungry and whinnied, and he wished it would stop. For some reason he felt no relief over his coming escape, and feared the effort, for his body was a bit too thick.

As he got back on the splitting coffins he noticed his weight; especially when he heard that crackle of breaking wood.

Having chosen the strongest coffin for the platform had been of no use. For no sooner was his full weight upon it than the lid gave way, jouncing him two feet down on a surface, which even he did not care to imagine what it was. Angered by the sound and by the stench, which filled the air, the waiting horse gave a scream and rushed off through the night, the wagon rattling behind it.

Birch was now too low for an easy escape out of the transom. He gathered his energies again for a new try. Grasping the edges of the opening, he tried to pull himself up, when he noticed a strange pull, like a drag on both his ankles. In one moment he knew fear for the first time that night.

For no matter how he struggled, he could not shake off the grip, which held his feet in captivity. Horrible pains shot through his legs. In his mind there was a confusion of fright mixed with an idea that suggested splinters, loose nails, or something else from a broken wooden box. At any rate he kicked and turned and almost fainted.

Instinct guided him in his wriggle through the transom and in the crawl that followed his plunge to the ground. He could not walk, and it was a horrible sight as he dragged his bleeding ankles toward the cemetery cabin. His fingers scraped the black mold, and his body responded with the slowness that one suffers when one is being chased by monsters in a nightmare. There was nothing chasing him, however. He was alone when Armington, the lodge-keeper, answered his beating at the door. Armington helped Birch to the outside of a bed and sent his little son for Doctor Davis. Birch was fully awake but would say nothing important. He merely muttered things such as "Oh, my ankles!", "Let go!", or "locked in the tomb". Then the doctor came and asked some hard questions. He removed the patient's outer clothing, shoes, and socks. The wounds for both ankles—terribly cut around the Achilles' tendons—puzzled the old physician.

The questions he asked grew more tense than normal, and his hands shook as he dressed the wounds. He bound them as if he wished to get the ankles out of sight as quickly as possible. For a level-headed doctor, Davis' confused cross-examination became very strange indeed as he tried to force every last detail of his horrible experience out of Birch. He was anxious to know if Birch were sure—absolutely sure—of the identity of that top coffin of the pile; how he had chosen it, and how he had been certain that it was the Fenner coffin.

And how he had told it apart from the inferior coffin of Asaph Sawyer. Would the strong Fenner casket have caved in so easily?

Davis, an old-time village doctor, had of course seen both coffins at the funerals, as he had attended both Fenner and Sawyer in their last illnesses. He had even wondered, at Sawyer's funeral, how the evil farmer had managed to lie so straight in a box that was so small.

After two full hours Doctor Davis left; he had urged Birch to insist that his wounds were caused by loose nails and splintered wood if somebody should ask. It would be better to say as little as possible, and to let no other doctor treat the wounds. Birch took this advice to heart until he told me his story. When I saw the scars—old and whitened—I agreed that he was wise in so doing. He remained disabled for the rest of his life as the great tendons had been severed.

But I think the greatest disability was in his soul. His thinking process, once so calm and logical, had become damaged. It was sad to hear his response to certain mentions such as "Friday", "Tomb", and "Coffin". His frightened horse had gone home, but his frightened mind never came back. He changed his business, but something always followed him.

It may have been just fear, and it may have been fear mixed with a strange sort of remorse for old wrongdoings. His drinking, of course, only made it worse.

When Doctor Davis left Birch that night, he had taken a lantern and gone to the receiving tomb. The moon was shining on the brick fragments and the facade, and the latch of the door gave way to a touch from the outside. Hardened by his experiences in morgues, the doctor entered and looked around, fighting the urge to vomit, which everything in there induced. He cried out once, and a little later gave a wheeze that was more terrible than a cry. Then he escaped back to the cabin and broke all the rules of his profession by shaking his patient awake, and wheezed at him in an upset tone.

“It was Asaph’s coffin, Birch, just as I thought! I knew his teeth, with the front ones missing on the upper jaw. For God’s sake, show those wounds! The body was pretty badly rotten, but if ever I saw cruelty on any face—or former face . . . You know what a fiend he was for revenge—how he ruined old Raymond thirty years after a lawsuit, and how he stepped on the puppy that snapped at him a year ago . . . He was the devil in person, Birch, and I believe his eye-for-an-eye fury could beat old Father Death himself. God, what a rage! I’d hate to have it aimed at me!